VDI Comparison: Five Reasons XenDesktop beats Horizon View

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Organizations like yours have many reasons for considering VDI, from providing remote access to Windows apps, to enabling BYOD, to taking a more strategic approach to desktop refresh. As you evaluate your options, you're probably looking at the industry's two top solutions for implementing VDI: Citrix XenDesktop and VMware Horizon View. The choice you make will define the business value you drive, so it's important to go beyond assumptions and first impressions and determine which solution will best help you achieve the goals of your own VDI initiative.

People often perceive the difference between XenDesktop and Horizon View in terms of the scope of their capabilities. Horizon View is a one-size-fits-all solution designed to deliver VDI and nothing else. XenDesktop takes a broader, more flexible approach to desktop virtualization, acknowledging the considerable benefits for both users and IT of delivering desktops and apps in the right way for each use case.

This is accurate as far as it goes. Citrix is an award-winning industry leader in desktop virtualization in part because of the breadth and depth of the options it provides for going beyond VDI, as underscored in the latest IDC MarketScape report. Users prefer XenDesktop over Horizon View because of the superior efficiency and user experience this flexibility makes possible. But people sometimes believe that the flexibility of XenDesktop is the only thing that distinguishes it from Horizon View, and that for a VDI-only implementation, Horizon View is probably just as good. And that simply isn't true.

Even ignoring the other virtual desktop and app delivery methods XenDesktop supports, and comparing it with Horizon View on a VDI-only basis, XenDesktop emerges as the clear winner. Here are five reasons why.

1. XenDesktop delivers a better experience for Windows apps on mobile devices

Today's enterprises need to empower productivity in more places, on more devices than ever—not just office-bound PCs and thin clients. Providing access to desktops and apps on any device, including corporate-issued and BYOD tablets, is a key part of the value of VDI—but only if it's truly usable. The form factor of a tablet, with its smaller display and a touch-screen interface in place of a two-button mouse, can make for a difficult and frustrating experience for Windows

desktop users. Horizon View does little to extend the value of VDI to mobile devices, but XenDesktop is designed specifically to deliver a great VDI experience on any device people use. The Citrix solution leverages HDX Mobile technologies to automatically re-skin Windows 7 desktops for an intuitive, touch-friendly experience that allows full productivity on tablets and other mobile devices.

XenDesktop also recognizes that there are times when it's more efficient for a user to interact with a single app rather than a full desktop. The ability to host apps independently from the desktop has always been a critical part of any virtual architecture, and it's a central element of the technology DNA of Citrix. When you find that your enterprise mobility or BYOD strategies call for moving beyond VDI, XenDesktop will still meet your needs—and Horizon View won't.

2. XenDesktop VDI can support heavy 3D applications

Many companies are now deciding to virtualize and host 3D applications or entire workstations in the datacenter in order to improve security, mobility and time to market. VDI makes it possible to empower users anywhere in the world with real-time access to professional 3D graphics and CAD/CAM applications as well as real-time collaboration around centrally hosted data.

XenDesktop leads the way in the virtual delivery of 3D professional graphics applications and workstations. HDX 3D Pro hardware-based GPU sharing of OpenGL-based 3D professional graphics apps helps ensure smooth graphics performance, while breakthrough deep compression technologies maximize traffic throughput over low-bandwidth networks. XenDesktop works with NVIDIA GRID™ technology, which accelerates graphics performance for virtualized desktops and apps by offloading graphics processing from the CPU to the GPU in virtualized environments. Unlike XenDesktop, VMware Horizon View is not designed for heavy 3D applications such as CAD/CAM, and VMware does not recommend using Horizon View for this use case.

3. XenDesktop supports client-side rendering to optimize performance

The PCoIP protocol at the heart of Horizon View is based on a simplistic approach to VDI: all rendering takes place in the datacenter and none on the endpoint, which is assumed to be a thin client. This makes it impossible to leverage resources on endpoints that aren't thin clients to optimize performance, in particular for video and graphics apps, and makes VDI less suitable for processing-intensive use cases.

Unlike Horizon View, XenDesktop detects the resources available on the endpoint, then dynamically adapts to server-side or client-side rendering to ensure optimal performance for multimedia content including Flash, Windows Media, and AVI multimedia playback. For mobile users, an H.264 standards-based super codec efficiently compresses server-side rendered video and graphics for hardware decode on mobile devices, providing double the frame rate while cutting network traffic compared to software rendering. Features like these let you deliver a local PC-like experience for rich multimedia applications delivered via VDI while conserving bandwidth and server-side overhead.

4. XenDesktop optimizes network performance for a great experience anywhere

Delivering a good user experience over a low-latency network connection with ample bandwidth is the easy part. To support remote and mobile users, your VDI solution has to be able to perform wherever they work, from distant offices, hotel rooms and customer sites to ad hoc locations like a highway rest stop or the sideline of a child's soccer game. What kind of experience will your users be able to access in scenarios where bandwidth is in contention, packets are getting lost and latency is unpredictable?

Lacking strong, integrated remote access, Horizon View leaves you to purchase and integrate third-party products to complete the solution, increasing complexity and delivering a less-than-seamless experience for users. XenDesktop addresses your requirements head-on with integrated networking and WAN optimization. The Citrix ICA protocol lets you create fine-grained prioritization policies for network traffic to get the most out of available network resources and maintain high service levels no matter how people connect—even over mobile broadband or remote office networks spanning continents.

5. XenDesktop saves time and money with efficient management and personalization

Personalization and customization help improve both productivity and satisfaction, especially for power users, by allowing users to install apps and preferences. On the other hand, a key benefit of VDI is to greatly simplify IT and increase efficiency through centralization. VMware handles golden image management and personalization via linked clone technology that customers find complicated and slow to update, especially with larger VDI deployments. To reduce the patch management complexity, Horizon View customers often settle for provisioning desktops from a resource pool that provides a clean virtual desktop each time a user connects.

XenDesktop customers don't have to choose between the IT benefits of pooled VDI and the user benefits of a personalized experience. Citrix Personal vDisk (PvD) technology makes it possible for users to apply customizations that persist between desktop sessions so each time they access their virtual desktop, they can work within the same familiar and productive app environment. At the same time, XenDesktop with Provisioning Services makes it simple to snapshot and version images for faster updates and roll backs. This helps customers manage even large deployments more efficiently while reducing complexity and the cost of virtual storage.

Conclusion

Your VDI initiative is an important step for your IT organization with potentially transformative benefits for your business. Why get started with a Horizon View solution that is complicated to install and won't meet your VDI objectives as effectively? XenDesktop is easier to install than Horizon View, requiring half as many steps and one console instead of four. That makes the choice even more clear. XenDesktop provides the great experience your users demand, the efficiency IT needs, and the flexibility your business depends on—wherever, however and on whatever device people work.

For more information on XenDesktop, please refer to these resources:

• 4 reasons to go beyond View with Citrix XenDesktop

• Deploying XenDesktop on vSphere

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